

Merchant and Nuuanu Streets --
Commercial Buildings
Honolulu
Honolulu County
Hawaii

HABS No. HI-55

HABS
HI,
2-HONLU,
18-

WRITTEN HISTORIC AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20013

HABS
HI,
2-HONLU,
18-

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

MERCHANT AND NUUANU STREETS COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS

HABS NO. HI-55

Location: 901 Nuuanu and 2 Merchant Sts. (Royal Saloon, HI-55 B)
902 Nuuanu St. (T. R. Foster Building, HI-55 L)
912-928 Nuuanu St. (Irwin Block, HI-55 M)
923 Nuuanu St. (Wing Wo Tai & Co. Building, HI-55 A)
14 Merchant St. (J. T. Waterhouse Building, HI-55 C)
24-32 Merchant St. (Yokohama Specie Bank Bldg., HI-55 D)
50 Merchant St. (Kamehama V Post Office, HI-7)
55 Merchant St. (Melcher's Building, HI-34)
65 Merchant St. (Bank of Bishop & Co. Bldg., HI-55 I)
77 Merchant St. (Bishop Estate Building, HI-55 H)
111 Merchant St. (Judd Building, HI-55 G)
115 Merchant St. (Stangenwald Building, HI-55 F)
842 Bethel St. (Honolulu Police Station, HI-55 K)
City and County of Honolulu, Hawaii.

Present Owner see individual H.A.B.S. reports.
Occupant, and Use:

Significance: The thirteen historic buildings near the intersection of Merchant and Nuuanu streets represent a cross-section of commercial uses and architecture present at the turn of the century in the old downtown. A range of banking establishments, government buildings, and wholesale and retail stores are housed in a variety of low-scaled masonry buildings.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

In the mid-nineteenth century, Merchant, King, Queen, Nuuanu, Kaahumanu, and Fort streets provided routes for the movement of goods received and sent via the Honolulu harbor. They are on a grid aligned with the ocean and the mountains, which are south/southwest and north/northeast, respectively. The city's earliest commercial buildings were erected on these streets in support of this traffic and exchange. Warehouses to store goods, shops at which to purchase imported goods, and accommodations and places of entertainment for those visiting the islands or trading were constructed. Maps indicate that the building stock was predominantly wood frame, but by the 1850s the Hawaiian equivalents of stone -- lava and coral -- were being utilized. There was no mandated pattern to construction; as the city grew in population, development occurred naturally, spreading farther along the shoreline as well as toward the mountains, creating a strip of development approximately one mile deep, encircling the inland mountains.

The land in this neighborhood was valuable prior to construction of any permanent buildings. In one celebrated dispute between the Hawaiian monarchy and the British consul, the land which the Honolulu Police Station occupies at Merchant and Nuuanu streets was central to the "Charlton Claim" which sparked the British occupation of the Kingdom of Hawaii in 1843. The Hawaiian government refused to accept as valid the British consul Richard Charlton's claim to the parcel of land. The conflict resulted in a five-month provisional cession of the Hawaiian kingdom to Great Britain. Although the kingdom was returned thereafter, the land claim remained unsettled. Finally the two kingdoms agreed that British officials would decide the issue, whereupon the land was pronounced Charlton's. Charlton soon sold the land, which was subsequently subdivided. Commercial development of those parcels and the surrounding area began shortly thereafter as the port city grew. [Honolulu Advertiser, 5-16-1930, p.3, and Thrum's Annual, 1893.]

In December of 1899, the Bubonic Plague attacked the city. [See Wing Wo Tai & Co. Building report, HABS No. HI-55 A.] To combat the plague's spread, city officials undertook a systematic burning of wood-frame structures in the infected area. The conflagration grew beyond control, however, and the burned area included all of Chinatown to the west, or "ewa" direction, and portions of the rest of downtown, confined by Bethel Street in the east, or "diamondhead" direction. [Minutes of the Board of Health Meetings, Jan. 20, 1900.] Subsequently, Chinatown was rebuilt, displaying a relatively homogeneous set of low brick, stone, and concrete structures.

By the turn of the century, the commercial center had developed near the corner of King and Fort Streets. This intersection was informally considered the heart of downtown, perhaps because King Street was the route of the island's trolley, beginning in 1901, and Fort Street had long been a central artery leading up from the harbor. One block away, at Merchant and Nuuanu streets, buildings remain from this period of intense commercial development.

The 2-1/2 blocks of Merchant St. and half a block of Nuuanu that were recorded by HABS contain commercial buildings that represent a cross-section of activities found in the downtown at the turn of the century. Commercial facilities are represented by Melcher's building, the Wing Wo Tai & Co. building, and the Irwin Block (Nippu Jiji) for retail of imported goods, the Waterhouse building for storage, and the Royal Saloon for entertainment. The government, too, was represented in this area, erecting the Post Office, the supposed first all concrete building in Hawaii, at Merchant and Bethel Streets. Diagonally across the street is the conspicuous Honolulu Police Station, the present structure on that site being the second such facility.

The Bishop & Co. building and the Yokohama Specie Bank building represent another important commercial activity. As the community matured economically, there grew a need for other industries and services to support its trade. Until the mid-nineteenth century, there was no organized banking system in Hawaii. Every man was responsible for safeguarding his own fortune. What little banking was required was conducted through Page, Bacon & Co. of San Francisco, which dealt in whalers' exchange. However, this system was

recognized as inadequate by local businessmen who thought Hawaii needed a mature banking system as well as a local coinage. Robert Crichton Wyllie, Minister of Foreign Affairs for King Kamehameha III, delivered the rousing "Report on CAPITAL and BANKING" on June 1, 1852, paving the way for action. [Tilton.] The Polynesian of August 14, 1858, announced that the system was to change, for Charles D. Bishop and William A. Aldrich were opening a bank by the name of "The Bank of Bishop & Co." After its erection in 1878, the company's bank building at the corner of Merchant and Kaahumanu streets helped establish this area as a financial center.

With the influx of foreign peoples to Hawaii, there was also an increasing need for them to have their own banks for transacting foreign exchange business with parent country. Such was the case for the Japanese in their establishment of the Yokohama Specie Bank, which was enabled to act as an agent of the Bank of Japan. Their monumental bank building was a prominent feature at the corner of Merchant and Bethel Streets.

The second change in Hawaii's financial system followed not long after the establishment of banking, for in the third quarter of the nineteenth century King Kalakaua was eager to have a coin cast in his image. This prompted the legislature to pass a bill in 1880 providing for the purchase of silver bullion to be coined into dollars and fractions of a dollar to be of identical weight and fineness to the coins of the United States. Claus Spreckels, a prominent local figure, purchased the bullion and arrangements were made with the San Francisco mint for the coinage of one million dollars. The first shipment arrived December 9, 1883, on the S.S. Mariposa and consisted of \$130,000 in half dollar pieces. By the year 1885, the whole coinage of \$1,000,000 had been received and was in circulation. [Bishop.]

In 1880, the population of Honolulu was about 13,000 [Lion Fire Insurance Map.] Twenty years later, the number had grown to 40,000. [Wilcox.] The city's service professions increased to include those found in any major city at the turn of the century. This expansion, in turn, necessitated a sharp increase in construction to accommodate the burgeoning business community, prompting the statement "architects and contractors are the busiest people in the city this season." [Paradise of the Pacific, December 1900.] The buildings constructed as part of this building boom deserve mention not only for their quantity, but for their quality of style as well. As one observer noted in 1902, there was a

change from commonplaceness in design, to style and dignity...as exemplified in such successful recent structures as the Judd and Stangenwald...The enterprising promoters of such structures, while building lasting monuments to themselves, are public benefactors, for by their munificence in erecting imposing buildings, the city is greatly benefitted in being made attractive by such improvements, not alone to the residents, but as well to the visitor and tourist. [W. E. Pinkham, "New Era of Building in Honolulu", in Thomas Thrum's Annual, 1902, p. 145.]

The buildings included in the Merchant and Nuuanu Streets Commercial Buildings documentation project range from simple warehouse structures of the mid-nineteenth century to stylistically sophisticated examples of architecture in the early twentieth century. They exhibit characteristic materials of brick, lava stone, coral, and concrete. The building heights range from one story to a "skyscraper" at six stories. The styles range from simple Classical details to an ornamental Classical Revival style, and from a heavy Romanesque style to a sophisticated Spanish Mediterranean, although most of the buildings exhibit the mixed influences of turn-of-the-century commercial architecture. Collectively, these buildings provide a representation of Honolulu architecture from the mid-nineteenth century forward.

As a result of gradual concentration elsewhere after the turn of the twentieth century, Merchant and Nuuanu Streets were relegated to a somewhat secondary role in the city's physical commercial development. Whereas downtown streets north and east, or "mauka and diamondhead," experienced more demolition and building of increasingly higher and more modern structures, buildings in this secondary area (Merchant and Nuuanu Streets) were allowed to remain, and so stand as landmarks of commercial life in Honolulu of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They create a bridge, then, from the more heavily developed downtown to the small-scale, ethnic Chinatown, adjacent to the west, or "ewa."

For more information on individual buildings in this area, see the reports filed under the individual HABS numbers listed at the beginning of this report.

Report prepared by Laura S. Alderman, Project Historian.

PART II. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Early Views:

From the Bishop Museum Photograph Collection:

Files: "Geography. Oahu. Honolulu Streets. Merchant S. pre-1900", "Geography. Oahu. Honolulu Streets. Merchant St. 1900-", "Geography. Oahu. Honolulu Streets. Nuuanu Ave. Downtown Area", "Business and Commerce. Banking and Financial Structures. First Hawaiian Bank", and "Business and Commerce. Banking and Financial Structures. Bank of Hawaii."

Album 12, Page 30, "C.B. Mus. 104, Gartley 196. Merchant Street, Honolulu, ca. 1890?" and Page 31, "B.Mus. 1106, Gartley 197. Nuuanu Street, Honolulu, ca. 1890?"

Baker, Ray Jerome. A Catalogue of Maui and Other Hawaiian Scenes for the Most Part Taken Between 1910-1915. Book 2, #DEM 25783.

_____. Honolulu Then and Now. #'s 30952, 30954, 30983, 30992, 31118.

_____. Scenes of Old Hawaii. #'s 31179, 31185, 31190.

Hawaii State Archives Files: "EPIDEMICS- Bubonic Plague (10)".
Contains photographs of downtown streets during fire of 1900.
"BLDGS, BUS: N-R", "BLDGS, BUS: A-Z", "BLDGS, BUS."

B. Primary and Unpublished Sources:

Honolulu Business Directory. 1889. Bishop Museum Library. Published that year only, although believed to be intended as annual publication. Listings are given by individuals, businesses, and streets.

Maps: Anthon's map of 1862, reproduced in Edward B. Scott, Saga of the Sandwich Islands Crystal Bay, Lake Tahoe, Nev.: The Sierra-Tahoe Publishing Co., 1968.

Lion Fire Insurance Company, 1879. Bishop Museum Map Collection.

B. F. Dillingham Fire Insurance Company for Board of Fire Underwriters of Honolulu, 1900, and 1906 corrected to 1911. Bishop Museum Map Collection and Hawaii State Archives.

Sanborn Map Company, 1914 uncorrected (Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.), 1914 corrected to 1925, 1927 uncorrected, and 1927 corrected to 1951. Bishop Museum Map Collection and Hawaii State Archives.

Downtown Improvement Association Research Department, 3-9-1964. Hawaii State Archives.

Minutes of the Board of Health Meetings, January 11, 1899, to April 30, 1900. Hawaii State Archives.

Interviews: Nancy Bannick, Freelance writer, currently writing book about Oahu's Historic Sites for the Hawaiian Historical Society.
Agnes Conrad, Former State Archivist.
Don Hibbard, Director of Historic Sites Section, Hawaii State Parks.

C. Secondary and Published Sources:

The Polynesian
8-14-1858

Honolulu Advertiser
5-6-1930, p.3

Paradise of the Pacific

1-1900

12-1900

Bishop, Charles D. Story of the Bank of Bishop & Co. Now Bishop First National Bank of Honolulu. Paradise of the Pacific Print, 1931.

Feher, Joseph, ed. Hawaii: A Pictorial History. Honolulu: Bishop Museum Press, 1969.

Greer, Richard. "Merchant Street Notes." Hawaii Historical Review. 1 (Jan. 1963):. 183-199

Scott, Edward B. The Saga of the Sandwich Islands, vol. I. Crystal Bay, Lake Tahoe, Nev.: The Sierra-Tahoe Publishing Co., 1968.

Thrum, Thomas. Hawaiian Almanac and Annual. Honolulu: Black & Auld Printers, 1875-1933.

Tilton, Cecil G. The History of Banking in Hawaii. The University of Hawaii, 1927.

Wilcox, Gaylord. "Business and Buildings: Downtown Honolulu's Old Fashioned Block." The Hawaiian Journal of History 6 (1972): 3-27.

D. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated:

Department of Interior Books. Hawaii State Archives. 100 volumes. Contain letters to and from Minister of Interior. Believed to be included are Road Superintendents' reports, which would be beneficial in determining dates of laying sidewalks and paving roads. The volumes have name indexes; thus, the persons in the various offices of the desired date must be used as the reference name.

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was jointly sponsored by First American Title Co., Historic Hawaii Foundation, and the National Park Service. Recorded under the direction of Kenneth L. Anderson, Chief of HABS, and Alison K. Hoagland, HABS Historian, the project was completed during the summer of 1987 at the Honolulu field office. Project supervisor was Robert C. Giebner (University of Arizona); project historian was Laura S. Alderman (Washington, D.C.); architectural foreman was J. Scott Anderson (Washington, D.C.); and architectural technicians were Coy E. Burney (University of Maryland), Kenneth R. Imoehl (University of Arizona), and Michel A. van Ackere (Brown University.)

PART IV. SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION

Following is a photocopy of a photograph from the Bishop Museum, "Merchant St., about 1900," Neg. No. 95586. On the left is the Kamehama V Post Office, and on the right, from the right, Melcher's Building, Bank of Bishop and Co., Bishop Estate Building, Judd Building, and Stangerwald Building.



826

MERCHANT ST.

Merchant St., about 1900.
P. O. Building at left

CP 75536